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STAR WARS
DOCTOR APHRA
STAR WARS
SCREAMING CITADEL
PART 3 OF 5
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THE SCREAMING CITADEL

Book I, Part III

In a galaxy oppressed by Imperial cruelty, there is little hope for the future. But for those used to operating on the fringes, there is potential for profit.

Rogue archaeologist Aphra is joined by young Rebel pilot Luke Skywalker at the Citadel of Ktath'atn — the Screaming Citadel — hoping to impress the Queen, who is able to activate an artifact with the consciousness of an ancient Jedi inside.

But Luke and Aphra soon discover that she intends to capture and control them. Outnumbered, the situation is dire—until rebels Princess Leia, Han Solo and Sana Starros arrive to even the odds....

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The Citadel Of Ktath'atn.
I DON'T CARE WHO'S WITH YOU, TRIPLE-ZERO...

HOME IN ON THIS SIGNAL! GET TO US! NOW!
ENOUGH RUNNING, APHRA. I'LL HOLD THEM BACK.

I HOPE.
LUKE, WAIT...

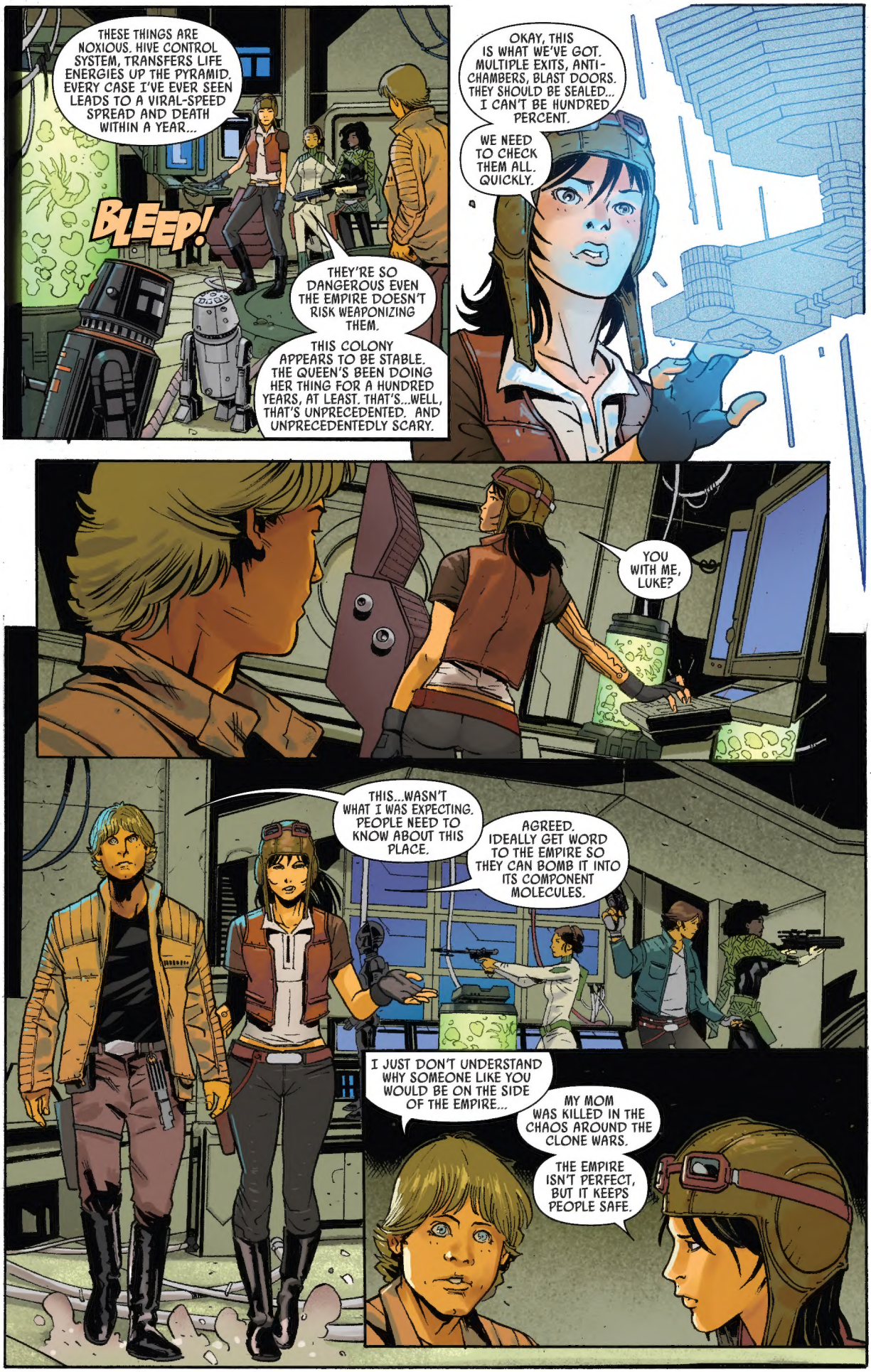
MY BEAUTIFUL... EXPENSIVE SHIP.
I'M SORRY, MASTER APHRA. THE UNKEMPT ONE INSISTED HE SHOULD FLY.
HATE TO BREAK IT TO YOU, SWEETHEART, BUT YOUR AFT THRUSTER ISN'T ALIGNED.
WELL, IT ISN'T ALIGNED NOW!
HEY, APHRA.
GOODBYE.

NO!
SHE'S WITH ME! WE'VE GOT A PLAN!
LUKE, YOU'RE THE FARMER WHO SWAPPED ALL THE WATER YOU'VE CONDENSED FOR AN EMPTY SACK...BUT SANA, YOU CAN'T JUST SHOOT HER.
REALLY? PAY ATTENTION. I JUST DID.
IF BLONDIE GETS OUT OF THE WAY, YOU CAN WATCH ME DO IT AGAIN.
I'M SORRY, BUT YOU'RE WRONG, AND THIS WAS MY CALL.
WE KNEW YOU'D TRY TO STOP US!
YOU WENT WITH HER VOLUNTARILY?
HOW COULD YOU BE SO DUMB? AGAIN!
SHE'S AN EX-IMPERIAL AGENT. SHE IS AS DANGEROUS AS SHE IS UNHINGED.
HOW DID SHE EVEN FIND US?
IT...
...WAS A LUCKY GUESS.
IT'S NOTHING YOU COULD HAVE DONE ANYTHING ABOUT.

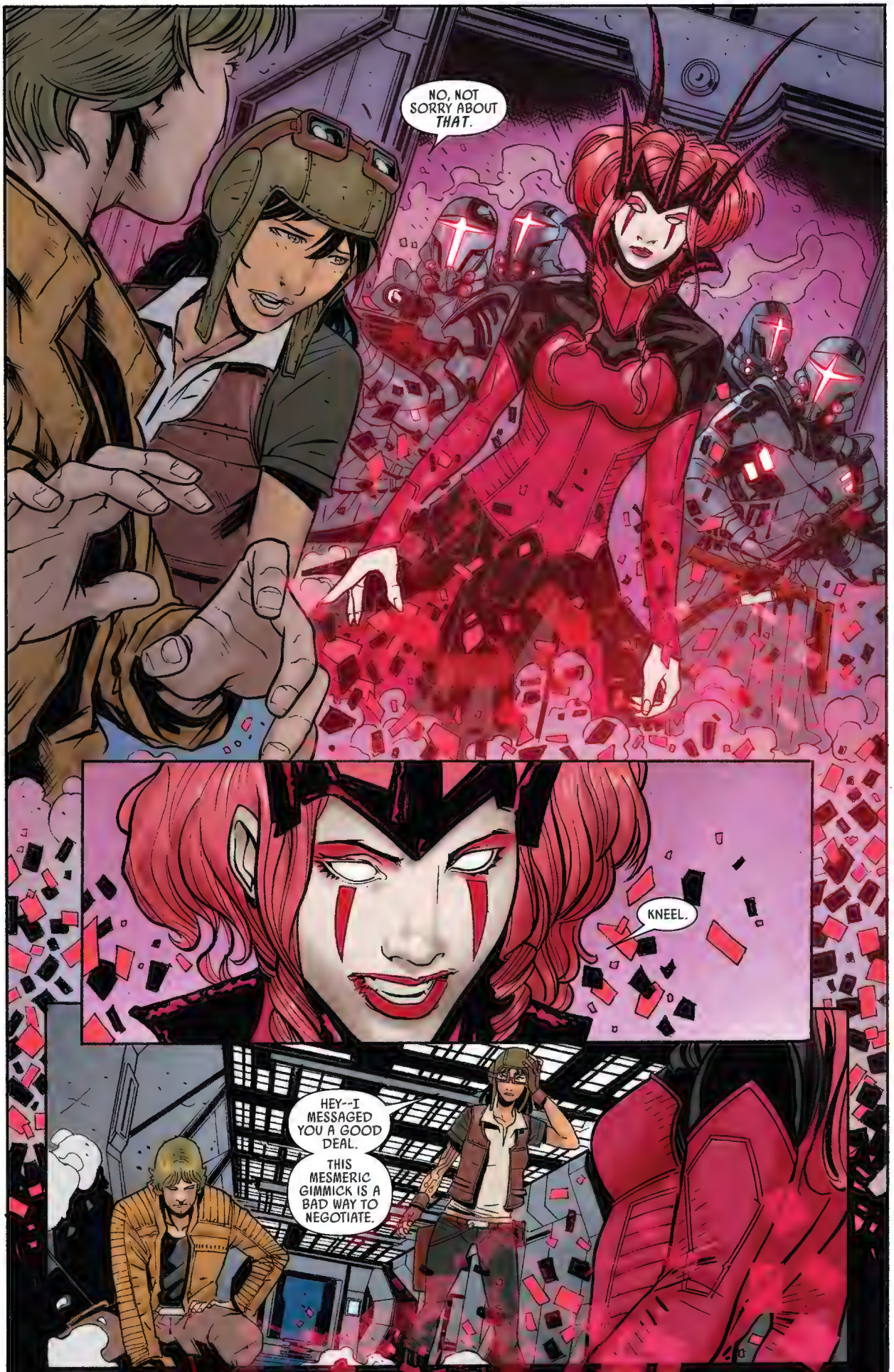
IF YOU'D LIKE A LITTLE ADVICE FROM ONE OF HER COLLEAGUES, THE SAFEST THING TO DO FOR YOUR SECURITY WOULD BE TO EXECUTE HER.
SHE IS TERRIBLY UNTRUSTWORTHY.
WHOSE SIDE ARE YOU ON?
MY OWN, MASTER APHRA.
AS ARE YOU.
WE DON'T HAVE TIME FOR THIS. YES, SHE'S ROUGH, BUT SHE'S A GOOD PERSON.
SHE NEARLY DIED HERE WITH ME. SHE'S TRYING TO FIND ME A JEDI TUTOR...
SHE'S A ROGUE ARCHAEOLOGIST--BUT SHE'S AN ARCHAEOLOGIST.
AND NOT ALL ROGUES ARE BAD PEOPLE.
I'M SORRY, SANA, BUT NO. NOT YET.
AND LUKE? YOU ARE THE WORST SOLDIER I HAVE EVER MET.
HERO OF YAVIN OR NOT, YOU WILL OBEY ORDERS, OR I WILL COURT-MARTIAL YOU BACK TO MOISTURE FARMING.
I STAND BY MY FRIENDS, LEIA.
APHRA'S MY FRIEND.
OKAY, THE SHIP'S SEEN BETTER DAYS. WHAT'S THE BEST WAY FROM HERE?
HEY, I'VE GOT AN IDEA...

...ANY DIRECTION AWAY FROM THEM!
WHERE ARE WE ACTUALLY GOING?
BIG STRONG DOORS. ALWAYS GOOD TO HIDE BEHIND. GET 'EM OPEN, BEETEE.
BLEEP!
MOVE!

SEAL IT! QUICKLY.
BLEEP!
GOOD WORK...BEETEE, RIGHT?
BLEEP!
I'M GOING TO ASSUME THAT'S A "THANK YOU."
PROBABLY BEST FOR YOU TO ASSUME THAT, PRINCESS LEIA.
OKAY-- THEY CAN'T GET IN THAT WAY.
CAN WE SEAL ANY OTHER DOORS WHILE WE THINK? AND...
FORGET SEALING DOORS!
WHAT'S IN THOSE TUBES?
THEY'RE ABERSYN SYMBIOTES.
GIVE ME FULL TERMINAL ACCESS, BEETEE.


THESE THINGS ARE NOXIOUS. HIVE CONTROL SYSTEM, TRANSFERS LIFE ENERGIES UP THE PYRAMID. EVERY CASE I'VE EVER SEEN LEADS TO A VIRAL-SPEED SPREAD AND DEATH WITHIN A YEAR...
BLEEP!
THEY'RE SO DANGEROUS EVEN THE EMPIRE DOESN'T RISK WEAPONIZING THEM.
THIS COLONY APPEARS TO BE STABLE. THE QUEEN'S BEEN DOING HER THING FOR A HUNDRED YEARS, AT LEAST. THAT'S...WELL, THAT'S UNPRECEDENTED. AND UNPRECEDENTEDLY SCARY.
OKAY, THIS IS WHAT WE'VE GOT. MULTIPLE EXITS, ANTI-CHAMBERS, BLAST DOORS. THEY SHOULD BE SEALED... I CAN'T BE HUNDRED PERCENT.
WE NEED TO CHECK THEM ALL. QUICKLY.
YOU WITH ME, LUKE?
THIS...WASN'T WHAT I WAS EXPECTING. PEOPLE NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PLACE.
AGREED. IDEALLY GET WORD TO THE EMPIRE SO THEY CAN BOMB IT INTO ITS COMPONENT MOLECULES.
I JUST DON'T UNDERSTAND WHY SOMEONE LIKE YOU WOULD BE ON THE SIDE OF THE EMPIRE...
MY MOM WAS KILLED IN THE CHAOS AROUND THE CLONE WARS.
THE EMPIRE ISN'T PERFECT, BUT IT KEEPS PEOPLE SAFE.

BUT IT'S NOT RIGHT. THE EMPIRE IS EVIL.
DON'T BE NAIVE. THE EMPIRE'S NOT FOR PEOPLE LIKE US. I DON'T NEED ANYONE, AND YOU'RE BASICALLY A NEARLY BURSTING BALLOON OF "THE-FORCE-LOVES-ME-THE-FORCE-LOVES-ME"!
BUT FOR NORMAL PEOPLE? FOR THEM, PRETTY MUCH ANY PEACE IS BETTER THAN WAR.
YOU ARE LIKE HAN.
HE'S WASN'T AS BAD AS HE PRETENDED TO BE EITHER.
YEAH, KEEP BELIEVING THAT.
I'VE BEEN THROUGH BAD TIMES TOO...BUT YOU CAN'T LET THAT STOP YOU.
WELL, YOU DON'T SHOW IT, LUKE. FROM THE TOP OF THAT TOUSLED MOP DOWNWARDS, YOU SCREAM "I GREW UP WITHOUT A CARE IN THE WORLD."
YOU MAY BE AIMING AT A JEDI, BUT YOU'RE THE WALKING EMBODIMENT OF WHAT GOOD FARM LIVING DOES FOR A BOY...
...AND EVERYONE ON MY FARM WAS SLAUGHTERED BY THE EMPIRE.
I WASN'T REALLY THINKING.
...
I'M SORRY.
IT'S OKAY.
WE ALL MAKE MISTAKES SOMETIMES.

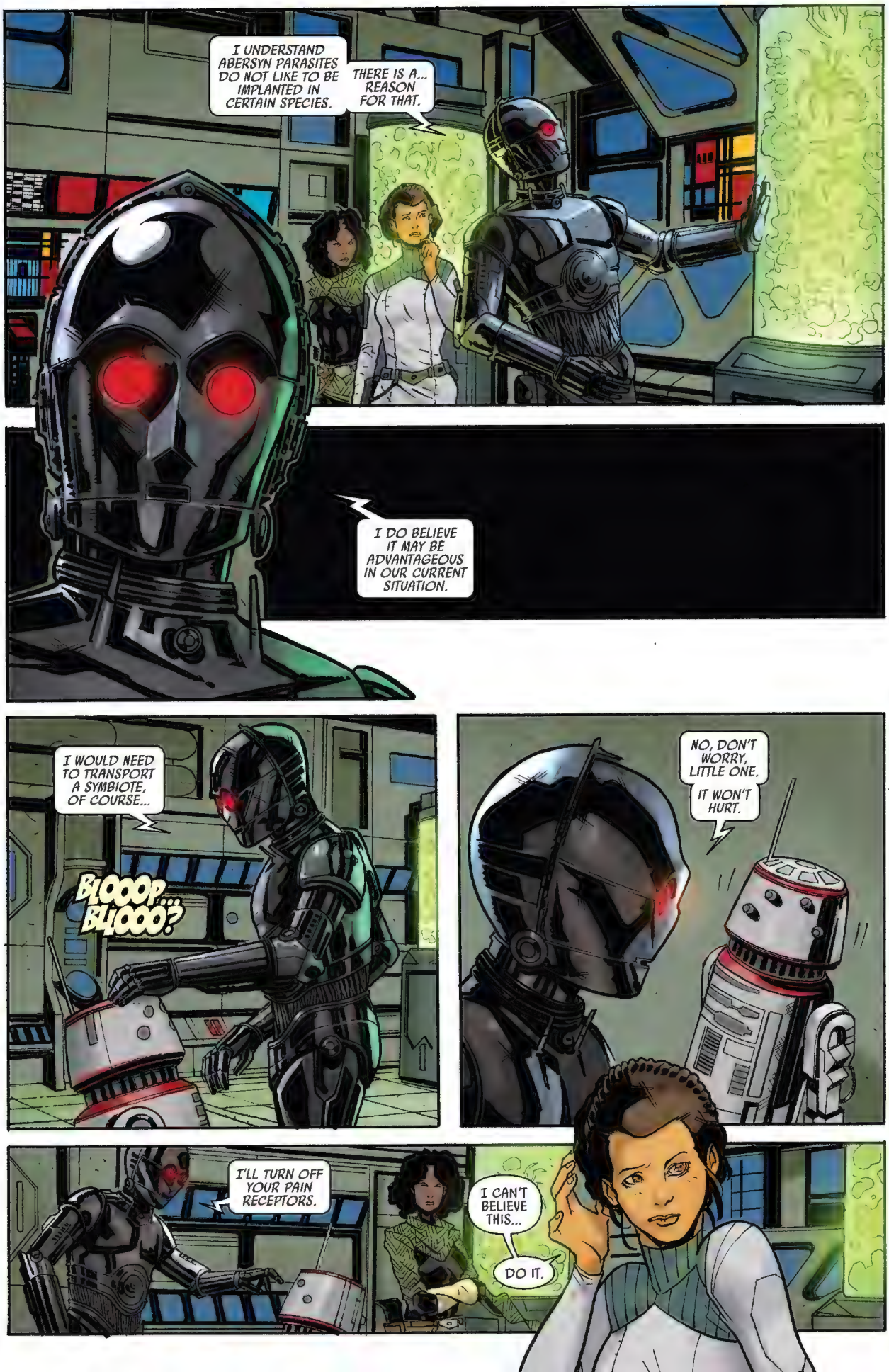

NO, NOT SORRY ABOUT THAT.
KNEEL.
HEY--I MESSAGED YOU A GOOD DEAL.
THIS MESMERIC GIMMICK IS A BAD WAY TO NEGOTIATE.

YOU WILL KNEEL.
YOU WILL...
OH, NO.
YOUR LITTLE TRICK ISN'T GOING TO WORK THROUGH THE POLARIZED GOGGLES, RIGHT?
AND YOU DOUBLE-CROSS ME AGAIN, AND I BLOW HIM UP.
I SLIPPED CHARGES INTO HIS POCKETS. I RELEASE THIS AND YOU'RE THE PROUD OWNER SEVERAL LITERS OF JEDI PAINT.
VERY WELL. I WILL SHOW YOU HOW TO REACTIVATE YOUR CRYSTAL.
I KNEW YOU'D SEE SENSE.
LUKE!
DESTROY THEM!
I TOLD YOU WE SHOULD HAVE KILLED APHRA!

BE CAREFUL! THE QUEEN'S GOT SOME KIND OF POWER.
YEAH, PRINCESS. FANCY TRICKS ARE ALL VERY WELL...
...BUT I'VE GOT A BLASTER.
OH.
HOW SWEET.

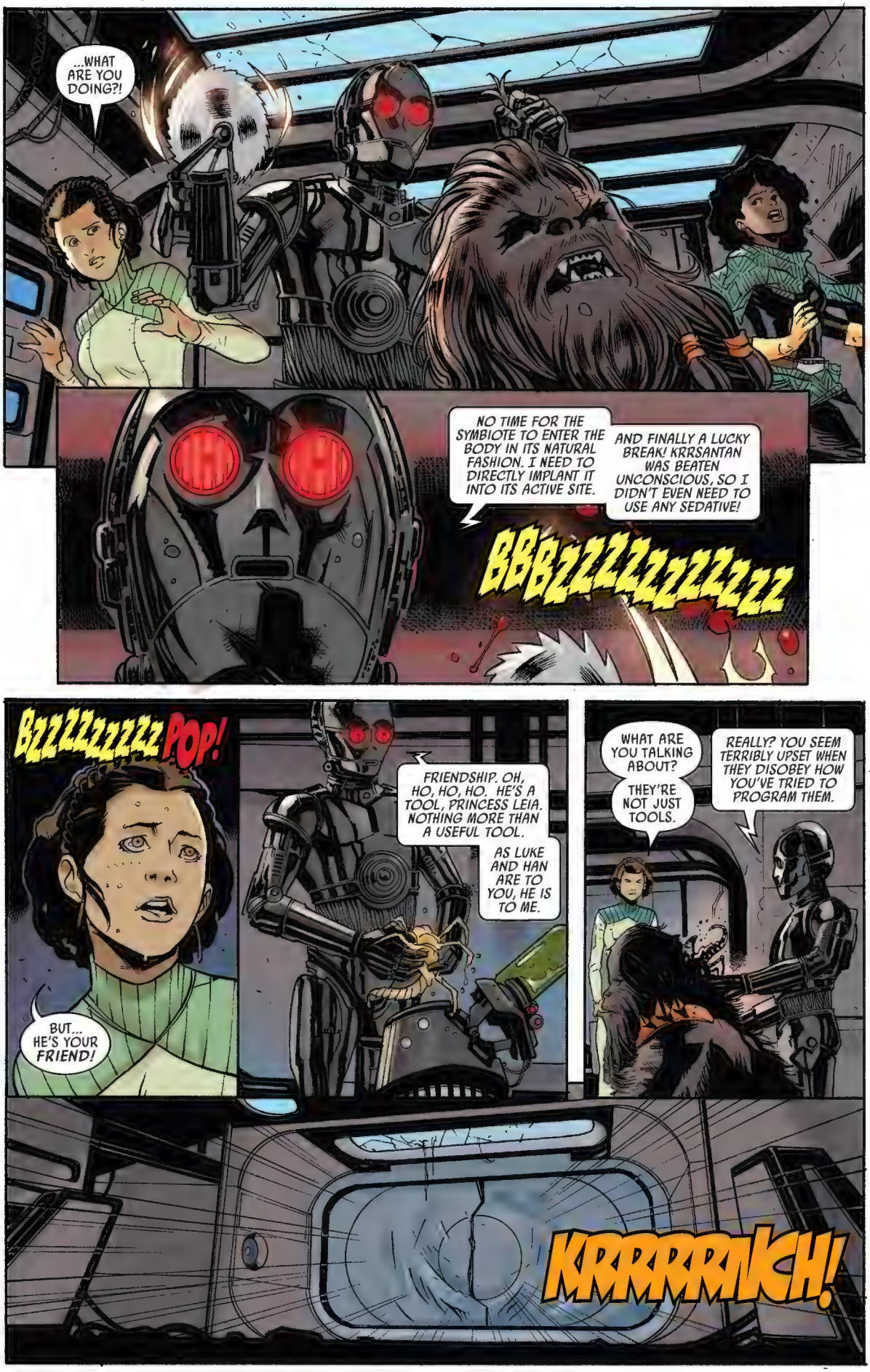
APHRA! ONE DAY SOMEONE IS GOING TO MAKE YOU PAY.
LISTEN!
THE BACK WALL IS THIN ENOUGH FOR BEETEE TO BLOW.
GET OUT OF HERE!

WE'RE NOT LEAVING LUKE OR HAN, NO MATTER HOW INCOMPETENT THEY MAY BE...
REALLY?
PRINCESS, IF IT REALLY CAME DOWN TO IT, HAN WOULD LEAVE NEARLY AS FAST AS APHRA DID...
YOU'RE ALL AS BAD AS EACH OTHER.
BEETEE, HAVE YOU GOT EXPLOSIVES ENOUGH TO--
BLEEP!
TAKE COVER, EVERYONE.
PRINCESS LEIA. BEFORE WE LEAVE, I HAVE A... SUGGESTION.

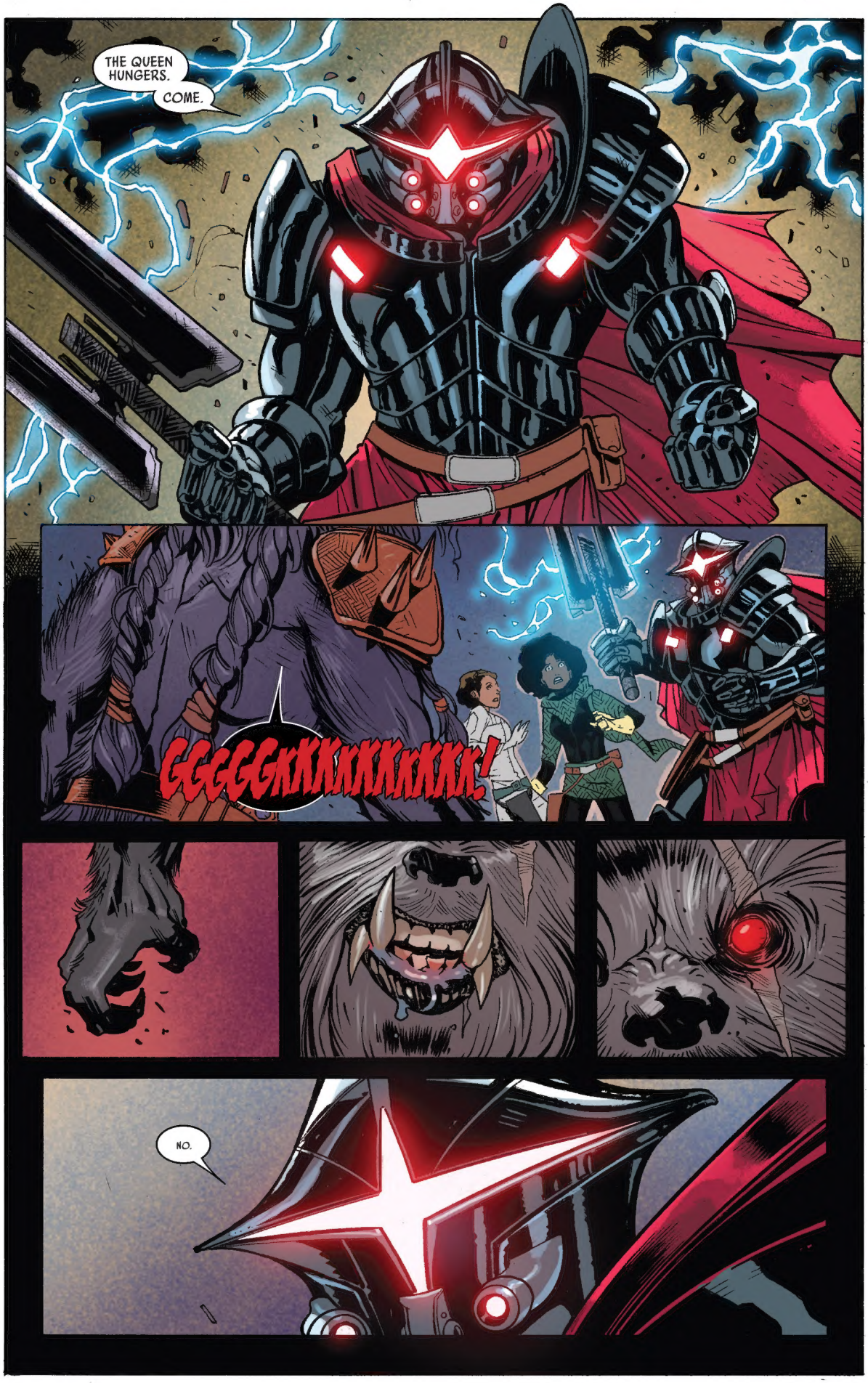

I UNDERSTAND ABERSYN PARASITES DO NOT LIKE TO BE IMPLANTED IN CERTAIN SPECIES.
THERE IS A... REASON FOR THAT.
I DO BELIEVE IT MAY BE ADVANTAGEOUS IN OUR CURRENT SITUATION.
I WOULD NEED TO TRANSPORT A SYMBIOTE, OF COURSE...
BLOOOP... BLOOO?
NO, DON'T WORRY, LITTLE ONE.
IT WON'T HURT.
I'LL TURN OFF YOUR PAIN RECEPTORS.
I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS...
DO IT.

Later...
OKAY, QUARANTINE SHOULD BE OVER THERE AND...
OH, GREAT.
I'LL DISTRACT HIM.
GET THE WOOKIEE INSIDE. BE READY TO CLOSE THE DOOR.
REALLY? THAT'S THE PLAN? YOU'VE BEEN HANGING AROUND HAN TOO MUCH.
HEY, UGLY! LEAVE HIM AL--

OH, GREAT.
BEETEE!
THANKS. SEAL THE DOOR.
QUICKLY. AND...


...WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!
NO TIME FOR THE SYMBIOTE TO ENTER THE BODY IN ITS NATURAL FASHION. I NEED TO DIRECTLY IMPLANT IT INTO ITS ACTIVE SITE.
AND FINALLY A LUCKY BREAK! KRRSANTAN WAS BEATEN UNCONSCIOUS, SO I DIDN'T EVEN NEED TO USE ANY SEDATIVE!
BBBzzzzzzzzzzz
BzzzzzzzzzPOP!
BUT... HE'S YOUR FRIEND!
FRIENDSHIP. OH, HO, HO, HO. HE'S A TOOL, PRINCESS LEIA. NOTHING MORE THAN A USEFUL TOOL.
AS LUKE AND HAN ARE TO YOU, HE IS TO ME.
WHAT ARE YOU TALKING ABOUT?
THEY'RE NOT JUST TOOLS.
REALLY? YOU SEEM TERRIBLY UPSET WHEN THEY DISOBEY HOW YOU'VE TRIED TO PROGRAM THEM.
KRRRRRRRCH!

UPDATE: THE BIG GUY CAN PUNCH THROUGH DOORS.
THAT IS...
BEAUTIFUL WORK DONE ON AN IMPOSSIBLE DEADLINE.
I WAS UNAWARE THAT "LOOKING QUEASY" WAS AN ALDERAANIAN COMPLIMENT. I'LL BE SURE TO ADD IT TO MY DATABASE.
YOU'RE A MONSTER.
PRINCESS LEIA! BEETEE AND I HAVE PROVEN OURSELVES 100 PERCENT EFFICIENT ASSETS TO FULFILL YOUR ENDS!
FROM ALL THE INTERACTIONS I'VE OBSERVED WITH YOUR "FRIENDS," IT SEEMS THAT YOU'D BE HAPPIER IF THEY WERE A LOT MORE LIKE US.
AM I MISTAKEN?
KRRRRRROOOOOM!


THE QUEEN HUNGERS.
COME.
GGGGGRKKKKKKKKKK!
NO.

GGRRHAGRGHHH!
I WOULD STEP BACK, PRINCESS LEIA.
THIS PARTICULAR TOOL WILL BE A TRIFLE MESSY.

STAR WARS™
NEXT ISSUE:
A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away is a lot easier to get to than you think – and we want to hear from you! Write us at StarWars@Marvel.com if you want to make it onto a future letters page. Don't forget to mark the letter "OK TO PRINT."